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**U.S. House of Representatives****COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

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**Landmark Accomplishments for Veterans: 2007-2010****A NEW DIRECTION: FUNDING THE NEEDS OF AMERICA'S VETERANS****Landmark Budgets Worthy of Our Veterans**

Since 2007, Congress has provided a 60% increase in VA discretionary funding, adding nearly \$23 billion for veterans' health care and services. Although the country was involved in two major conflicts from 2003 to 2006, VA health care funding did not increase, co-pay increases were proposed, and investment in much-needed research to provide the best care for veterans suffering from unknown injuries languished. Responding to a VA strained to its breaking point, Committee Members went to work to ensure that the cost of the war included the cost of the warrior and fought for budgets that honor the sacrifices of our service members and veterans.

**Advance Appropriations for Veterans Health Care**

Congress successfully secured advance appropriations for the VA, for the first time providing a stable and uninterrupted source of funding for medical care for veterans one year in advance. Typically, the veterans' health care budget is subject to political delays – but not this year! This landmark legislation guarantees that the VA can better prepare for the health care needs of America's veterans. *(P.L. 111-81)*

**A NEW DIRECTION: PROVIDING BETTER BENEFITS FOR VETERANS****Enhanced Employment Opportunities**

The Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010 reauthorizes the VA work-study program and provides on-the-job training for veterans in the energy sector. *(P.L. 111-275)*

**Better Insurance Options for Service Members and Veterans**

The Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010 ensures the welfare of veterans and their families by increasing outdated insurance policy limits for service members and veterans and allowing totally disabled veterans to receive free Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance coverage for two years following separation. *(P.L. 111-275)*

**Honor for Fallen Service Members and Their Families**

The Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010 increases burial and funeral benefits and plot allowances for veterans who are eligible for a burial at a national cemetery or who died in a VA facility from \$300 to \$700. *(P.L. 111-275)*

**Protection for Service Members Called to Combat**

The Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010 prohibits early termination fees for certain contracts after service members receive notice of military orders to relocate to a site that does not support the contract. *(P.L. 111-275)*

**Expanded Eligibility for Emergency Treatment**

A new law expands veteran eligibility to require the VA to pay for emergency treatment for a non-service connected condition if a third party is not responsible for the full cost of care. *(P.L. 111-137)*

**Better Benefits**

The Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010 increases the number of veterans able to receive independent assisted living services, provides greater automobile and adaptive equipment to veterans with severe burn injuries, and increases the automobile allowance for disabled veterans from \$11,000 to \$18,900. *(P.L. 111-275)*

## **A NEW DIRECTION: QUALITY HEALTH CARE FOR VETERANS**

### **More Access for More Veterans, Better Care for Women Veterans, More Rural Health Options**

Additional funding allowed VA to raise the income threshold by 10 percent to enroll 193,000 new veterans and plans to raise the income threshold by 15 percent to enroll an additional 99,000 veterans in 2011. The Caregivers Act of 2010 expands and improves VA services for the 1.8 million women veterans, anticipates the expected increase of women warriors over the next five years, and provides for a much-needed study on barriers to health care access for women. Congress provided an additional \$30 million in funding to increase the number of Community Based Outpatient Clinics for the more than 3.2 million veterans living in rural areas who do not have ready access to VA hospitals. The Caregivers Act of 2010 supports veteran service organizations that provide transportation for veterans in highly rural areas and increases rural health care options by authorizing stronger partnerships with community providers. (*P.L. 111-163 and P.L. 111-117*)

### **Increased Support for All Veteran Caregivers**

Supporting veteran caregivers was the top legislative priority of many veteran service organizations. The Caregivers Act of 2010 provides immediate support for veteran caregivers by creating a program to offer caregiver training, access to mental health counseling, and 24-hour respite care in the veteran's home. This allows caregivers temporary relief without having to leave the veteran at a medical facility. Certain veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom are eligible to select a caregiver to receive a financial stipend along with travel and lodging expenses associated with the veteran's care. (*P.L. 111-163*)

### **Addressed Urgent Mental Health Needs of Veterans, Focused on Suicide Prevention, Simplified Process to Get Service Connection for PTSD**

The Caregivers Act of 2010 addresses the troubling reality of post-traumatic stress and troubling incidents of suicide among the veteran population by requiring a much-needed and long-awaited study on veterans' suicide and requiring the VA to provide counseling referrals for members of the Armed Forces who are not otherwise eligible for readjustment counseling. After Congressional pressure to address the difficulties veterans encountered when required to prove stressors in order to receive service-connected compensation for post-traumatic stress incurred as a result of their military service, VA simplified the process to immediately help combat veterans get the help they need. Now, proof of service in uniform in a war zone, combined with a later diagnosis of PTSD, will be all that is required. (*P.L. 111-163*)

### **Expanded Veteran Homelessness Prevention and Care**

Congress provided funding to renovate surplus buildings on VA medical campuses to use as housing for homeless veterans. The Caregivers Act of 2010 expands the number of places where homeless veterans may receive supportive services. For veterans struggling without a roof over their heads, this small change in the law will make a big difference in their lives. The Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010 reauthorizes the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program through fiscal year 2011 and authorizes an additional \$1 million to provide dedicated services for homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children. Grants would be made available to provide job training, counseling, placement services, and child care services to expedite the reintegration of veterans into the labor force. (*P.L. 111-163 and P.L. 111-275*)

### **Invested in Research for Veterans' Health Care, Including Gulf War Illness**

Congress invested in healing and helping injured veterans by adding \$144 million for medical and prosthetic research, an increase of more than 25% over three years. Congressional hearings found that veterans are suffering from acute and chronic symptoms attributed to their military service in the Gulf War Region and continue to experience barriers to care and services from the VA. The Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010 extends the evaluation of chronic multi-symptom illness by the National Academy of Sciences of veterans of the Persian Gulf War and Post-9/11 Global Operations and allows the Institute of Medicine to carry out a comprehensive review of best treatment practices for chronic multi-symptom illness in Gulf War veterans, along with a plan for dissemination of best practices through VA. (*P.L. 111-163 and P.L. 111-275*)